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ABSTRACT

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A PRE-GROUP TRAINING TECHNIQUE FOR ENCOUNTER GROUP STRESS

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A PREGROUP TRAINING TECHNIQUE FOR ENCOUNTER GROUP STRESS

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of induced effect as a pregroup training experience for coping with stress related to participation in an encounter group. Twenty-six subjects who volunteered to participate in an encounter group randomly were assigned to three treatment groups, Induced Affect Training plus the Encounter Group, Induced Affect Training only and, Encounter Group only. The hypothesis that (a) group participants who did not receive the Induced Affect Pregroup Training would demonstrate significant increases on the Neuroticism Scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory and (b) group members who did receive such training would not manifest such increases were supported. The implications of using the technique of induced affect as a pretraining experience are discussed.

Recent years have shown a growing interest in pretraining prospective clients for therapy. Essentially, three methods have systematically prepared clients for therapy: (a) role induction training in which clients participate in structured didactic sessions prior to beginning therapy (Hoehn-Saric, 1964), (b) vicarious pretherapy training based on imitation learning and modeling procedures (Ritter, 1968), and (c) therapeutic programs where the client is presented with study materials designed to orient him to therapy (Wolberg, 1967). A review by Goldstein (1971) reported that pretraining attempts have met with reasonable success by facilitating more appropriate behaviors and outcomes in psychotherapy. Such research has focused primarily upon teaching prospective clients about appropriate role behaviors in individual therapy by means of a structured information-giving model. Few attempts have provided clients with direct and specific training or prepared encounter and therapy group clients for their experiences. The present study attempted to explore the use of an experiential pregroup training procedure for encounter group participants.

Some of the positive and desirable effects of encounter group participation have been documented by recent studies (Foulds, 1971; Jacobson & Smith, 1972). However, an increasing number of reports suggest that participation in encounter groups may at times be unpleasant or even harmful enough to be psychiatrically disruptive (Gottschalk, 1966), Reddy (1971) has indicated that the growth in the encounter group movement has been accompanied by a proportionate increase in the number of reported adverse reactions. Such phenomena have been substantiated by recent studies (Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973) that have reported negative and undesirable effects related to encounter groups.

Reports of negative experiences have been frequent enough to warrant the investigation of procedures that might reduce or prevent the occurrence of such effects. The present study was designed to investigate the possible efficacy of a specific pregroup training experience as one method for preventing or reducing undesirable effects. The therapeutic method of induced affect (Sipprelle, 1967) has been used by Jordan and Sipprelle (1972) to teach coping behaviors in response to intense affective arousal and by Korn, Ascough and Kleemeier (1972) as an active process for teaching general anxiety reduction skills. Implicit in such studies has been the assumption that the method of induced affect can be used as an anxiety prevention technique. If induced affect does facilitate the development of specific coping behaviors in response to stressful situations, then it may have potential as a method for strengthening an individual's ability to cope with anxiety and other intense emotional reactions related to encounter group participation. Induced affect, originally termed induced anxiety (Sipprelle, 1967), involves three alternating stages that are induced by the following instructional sequence: (a) an initial deep relaxation period, (b) non-specific affective arousal, and (c) a final relaxation period. The arousal state is induced initially by suggestion and the resultant affect is operantly reinforced. This sequence may be repeated any predetermined number of times.

We hypothesized that the results of the present study would support the findings of previous studies which have suggested that participants in encounter groups often demonstrate significant negative changes on selected personality measures. Specifically, we predicted that group participants who did not receive induced affect-pregroup training would demonstrate a significant increase on the Neuroticism Scale of the Eysenck Personality Inventory whereas group members who did receive such training would not manifest such significant changes.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 26 undergraduate students at Purdue University who volunteered to participate in a one-day, eight-hour encounter group program conducted by the Psychological Services Center. The 12 male and 14 female subjects were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The number of men and women were proportional in each group.

Instruments

Eysenck Personality Inventory. The Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) contains 57 items that yield measures on two dimensions, Extraversion-Introversion and Neuroticism-Stability. A Lie Scale is included to assess response distortion and defensiveness.

Bell and Howell Encountertapes.[2] The Bell and Howell Encountertapes (Berzon & Solomon, 1966) are an audiotaped program of ten sequential tapes consisting of specific interpersonal exercises for self-directed encounter groups. The purpose of each exercise is to enhance the interpersonal functioning and personal growth of the individual participants by facilitating interaction among the group members (e.g., practice in giving and receiving feedback, developing interpersonal trust, etc.).

Procedure

Three weeks before the encounter group, all participants met together and were asked whether they would participate in a research project as a part of the group experience. They were not told of the nature of the project

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[2]Information about the Bell and Howell Encountertape Program may be obtained by writing the Human Development Institute, 84 Old Ivy, N.E., Atlanta, Georgia 30305.

except that they would be assigned randomly to a group and that they might be asked to meet for four preliminary sessions prior to the day-long group program. All subjects agreed to participate and were administered the EPI. The subjects were assigned randomly to one of three groups: (a) Induced Affect Training plus the Encounter Group experience; (b) Induced Affect Training only and; (c) Encounter Group participation with no induced affect training.

The Induced Affect + Encounter Group subjects and the Induced Affect Only subjects received individual induced affect training in four 50 minute sessions during the two weeks prior to the encounter group experience. The training was conducted by using an audiotaped procedure[3] which presented instructions on the alternating stages of deep muscle relaxation (Berstein & Borkovec, 1973) and affective arousal. Each session consisted of the individual subjects receiving the following instructional sequence: (a) three minutes of introductory comments regarding the technique, (b) five minutes of deep muscle relaxation instructions, (c) eight minutes of affective arousal instructions, (d) eight minutes of deep muscle relaxation, (e) eight minutes of affective arousal, (f) eight minutes of deep muscle relaxation, and (g) ten minutes of debriefing at the end of the session. The periods of affective arousal were initiated by instructing the subjects to recall and focus on any strong affective reactions they had previously experienced or anticipated having. Resultant affective reactions displayed by the subjects were operantly reinforced (e.g., "That's good, let the feeling flow, let it get stronger, let it grow....").

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[3]A transcript of the audiotaped instructions are available on request from the first author of the present study.

Two days following the last induced affect session the eight-hour encounter group was conducted by using the Bell & Howell Encountertapes as the stimulus material and structure for the group program. Lecturettes and instructions for the verbal and nonverbal exercises were presented to the group members by means of the Encountertapes. The taped input was stopped while the subjects proceeded with each activity presented on the audiotape. The groups were conducted simultaneously in separate rooms in the facilities of the Krannert Behavioral Sciences Laboratory at Purdue University. This enabled the experimenters to monitor the activities of each group and to present simultaneously the audiotaped instructions to the groups from a common control and observation center. Posttesting was completed following the termination of the encounter group program. The Induced Affect Only subjects participated in an encounter group after the posttesting was completed.

Results

The mean pre and posttest EPI scores and analyses for each group are presented in Table 1. A 3 x 2 analysis of variance with repeated measures on the second variable was used to analyze the data for each EPI scale. Additional analysis of variance results verified no significant pretest differences among the groups on any of the EPI scales.

Insert Table 1 About Here

An analysis of variance on the Neuroticism Scale yielded, as predicted, significant trials effects (Pre-Posttesting) (F=12.906, df=1/23, $p < .01$) and a Groups X Trials interaction (F=4.621, df=2/23, $p < .05$). The Newman-Keuls test for mean differences (Winer, 1962) revealed that the Induced Affect +

Encounter Group subjects and the Induced Affect Only subjects did not change significantly on Neuroticism from pre to posttesting (see Table 1). The Group Only subjects did, however, demonstrate a significant increase on the Neuroticism Scale ($p < .01$). Tests of simple effects (Winer, 1962) based on the significant interaction effect supported the Newman-Keuls results that only the subjects in the Group Only condition increased significantly on the Neuroticism Scale ($F = 18.74$, $df = 1/23$, $p < .01$). These findings support the hypothesis under investigation.

The analysis of variance results on the Extraversion dimension yielded a significant trials effect ($F = 4.44$, $df = 1/23$, $p < .05$). A Newman-Keuls test for mean differences revealed that the Induced Affect + Encounter Group subjects increased significantly on Extraversion whereas the Induced Affect Only subjects and the Group Only subjects did not change significantly from pre to posttesting ($p < .05$) (see Table 1).

The results of the analysis of variance on the Lie Scale yielded a significant trials effect ($F = 11.16$, $df = 1/23$, $p < .01$). The Newman-Keuls results revealed that the scores of both the Induced Affect + Encounter Group subjects and the Group Only subjects decreased significantly from pre to posttesting ($p < .01$). The Induced Affect Only subjects showed no significant change (see Table 1).

In summary, subjects who participated only in the group experience increased significantly on the Neuroticism Scale; subjects who received the pregroup training before their group experience demonstrated significant increases on the Extraversion Scale; and subjects who participated in a group experience (including subjects who did and did not receive the pregroup training) decreased significantly on the Lie Scale.

Discussion

Eysenck (1968) describes neuroticism as "the general emotional over-responsiveness and liability to neurotic breakdown under stress (p. 5)" and has presented support for his conclusion that low Neuroticism scores on the EPI are associated with "better adjustment." The mean Neuroticism scores for Eysenck's normative populations of "normals" and American college students are 9.0 and 10.9 respectively. The obtained mean scores for the Group Only subjects were below both normative means at pretesting and above both normative means at posttesting (see Table 1). Hence, the significantly increased Neuroticism score for the Group Only subjects might be considered an undesirable postgroup change. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Lieberman, Yalom & Miles, 1973). Since the Induced Affect + Encounter Group subjects did not manifest such an increase, it appears as if the induced affect pregroup training served as an effective coping or preventative technique for responding to stress associated with participation in an encounter group.

Eysenck (1968) describes extraversion as "the outgoing, uninhibited, and sociable inclination of a person (p. 5)." The Induced Affect + Encounter Group subjects' significant increase on extraversion may reflect less inhibition and more approach behavior in interpersonal interactions as a result of the induced affect and encounter group combination. Even though encounter groups are intended to increase interpersonal approach behavior this combination may be more facilitative toward this end than just participating in an encounter group experience.

Although a prevailing norm in encounter groups is to reduce the defensiveness of individual participants, induced affect training is intended to strengthen

the individual's ability to cope with intense anxiety and affect rather than to avoid experiencing them. The technique of induced affect provides an opportunity to experience intense affective arousal and its subsequent control prior to the group experience. Thus, such training should facilitate a more flexible and appropriate use of defenses during the group.

The results of this study support the feasibility of a preventative orientation with respect to the increasing use of encounter groups. Specifically this study demonstrates the efficacy of a specific pretraining experience as an example of this preventative orientation. Typically, a response to reports of deterimental encounter group experiences has been an increased emphasis on participant screening procedures. The development and use of pregroup training experiences could be added to this response and may reduce the pressure to overexclude prospective group participants. Thus, the beneficial aspects of encounter groups might be made more safely available.

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Table 1

Pre-Post Mean Differences on Eysenck Personality Inventory

Treatment Condition	N	Neuroticism					Extraversion					Lie				
		Pre		Post		Pre-Post	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	Pre		Post		Pre-Post
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mean Difference	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mean Difference	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mean Difference
Induced Affect + Group	10	8.10	3.28	9.60	3.63	1.50	12.00	3.02	13.90	2.47	1.90*	2.00	1.56	1.00	1.63	-1.00*
Induced Affect Only	9	8.67	3.20	9.00	3.74	.33	12.11	3.69	12.00	4.61	- .11	2.44	1.42	1.89	1.05	- .55
Group Only	7	7.57	3.10	11.86	3.39	4.29**	11.86	2.79	13.57	5.00	1.71	1.57	2.15	.29	.76	-1.28*

*$p < .05$, Neuman-Keuls

**$p < .01$, Neuman-Keuls